

Acupuncture Helps Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Acupuncture may help people with posttraumatic stress disorder according to a recent clinical trial. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened. Traumatic events that may trigger PTSD include violent personal assaults, natural or human-caused disasters, accidents, or military combat.

Dr. Michael Hollifield, associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Louisville in Kentucky, conducted the study of acupuncture and PTSD at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. The study involved 73 men and women with PTSD, including a handful of combat veterans, and was supported by the National Institutes of Health and the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. The researchers analyzed depression, anxiety, and impairment.

The participants were assigned to receive either an empirically developed acupuncture treatment or group cognitive-behavioral therapy over 12 weeks, or were assigned to a wait-list as part of the control group. The people in the control group were offered treatment or referral for treatment at the end of their participation.

The researchers found that acupuncture provided treatment effects similar to group cognitive-behavioral therapy; both interventions were superior to the control group. Additionally, treatment effects of both the acupuncture and the group therapy were maintained for 3 months after the end of treatment.

"Acupuncture in this preliminary pilot study looked to be very helpful for PTSD and perhaps in some ways as helpful as the standard treatment of cognitive behavioral therapy," says Hollifield, "Acupuncture proved helpful enough to where some participants said they were significantly helped and/or did not have as much of their post-traumatic stress symptoms anymore."

Source: Acupuncture for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Randomized Controlled Pilot Trial. *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease*. 195(6):504-513, June 2007